

## Everybody Knows

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### Summary

When Future Chris decides to try and fix the timeline by returning to Boreth, he goes to the one person who might be able to help.

### Notes

Originally posted on AO3. Title from Leonard Cohen:

*Everybody knows that the dice are loaded  
Everybody rolls with their fingers crossed  
Everybody knows the war is over  
Everybody knows the good guys lost...*

Ash sighs, leaning back in his chair. "I really don't have time for this, Chris."

He looks tired, worn down, but then everyone does nowadays. The Federation is fracturing, caught in an endless war of attrition, and while Chris doesn't know much about the workings of Section 31 he'd be shocked if they've survived unscathed.

Part of him feels bad for putting this on Ash's shoulders, but he's considered it from every angle and this is his best shot at getting his plan to work.

And he needs it to work.

"We're not going to win this war," he says. "You know that, I know that. I've spent ten years trying to find a way out, to make up for-"

He breaks off, but Ash finishes the sentence anyway. "For starting the war?" He shakes his head. "Don't tell me you're still blaming yourself."

"I wasn't supposed to be there," Chris replies. He's thought about it over and over; where he went wrong, where he went *right*, what he could have done differently to change the outcome and keep that first domino from falling. "If I hadn't been, if another captain had been in that position, they might have made different choices. Found a way to avoid the war."

"Michael used to say the same things about the Klingon war," Ash tells him. Chris tenses at the name; thoughts of Michael always lead to thoughts of Spock, and it hurts to think of Spock. "That if she'd only done things differently, been better or faster or whatever, it might never have happened. But that's not true. T'Kuvma would've attacked no matter what she did, and it's the same here. The Romulans wanted this. It doesn't *matter* who was in the captain's chair that day, there was always going to be a war."

"You don't know that," Chris replies.

"Neither do you." Ash meets his gaze squarely. "I know it would be nice to believe you can fix this, but you can't. For better or worse, this is the world we live in."

"Maybe so," Chris says. "But I have to at least try. I'll do it without you if I have to, but it would be easier if I had some help."

Ash shakes his head slowly. "I don't even know if I *can* help you. Any sway I had with the Klingon Empire died with L'Rell."

It says something about the current situation, Chris thinks, that the chancellor's death amounted to little more than a footnote in the

Federation's news cycles. Their only saving grace is that the new leadership seems content to continue the fragile neutrality between their people, but maybe they're just hoping the Romulans will wipe out the Federation in their stead.

"He's your son," Chris says. "That's not nothing."

"Barely," Ash counters, but then he sighs. "Look, I'll see what I can do, but I'm not promising anything."

"Thank you," Chris tells him. It might only be a small chance, but it's better than nothing.

Ash stares at him for a long moment, weariness etched in every line of his face. "I'm pretty sure any attempt to tell you not to do this would be futile," he says, "but at least think about it? We're barely hanging on already. We can't afford to lose anyone else."

"I know," Chris replies. There are a million other things he could say – *It'll work* or *I have to do this* or even *I'm sorry* – but he knows there's only one thing Ash wants to hear, and they've been through too much together for Chris to lie to him like that.

"Thanks," he says instead, and hopes it doesn't sound too much like goodbye.

\* \* \*

The message comes through a few days later: clearance for travel to Boreth and the use of one of Section 31's specially outfitted shuttles. The message is impersonal and businesslike, but Chris can see the emotion lurking there, underneath. *We can't afford to lose anyone else.*

*If this works*, he thinks, *we won't have to.*

He'll make sure of that.

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